

**Soldiers** *Online*

# AFNORTH:

## Defending Europe

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer

**S**INCE the end of the Cold War NATO's Allied Forces Central Europe headquarters, located at Hendrick van Nassau Ouwkerk Camp in Brunssum, Netherlands, has planned and coordinated the defense of Central Europe.

In March, three major subordinate headquarters — AFCENT; Allied Forces Northwest, near London; and Allied Forces North, (covering Turkey and the Mediterranean) — merged to form Regional Headquarters, Allied Forces North, in Brunssum and RHQs., South, in Naples, Italy, said RHQs. AFNORTH spokesman LTC Tom Gaetjen.

Planning and coordinating the defense of Central Europe is still the primary mission of the newly structured NATO headquarters, but on a

much larger scale, said Gaetjen. Of its 2,400 U.S. military personnel, 36 percent are U.S. soldiers. They work with military personnel from about a dozen other nations.

AFNORTH currently includes some 330 soldiers at six locations. Besides 260 in the Netherlands, they are located in Rhinedahlen, Mannheim and Heidelberg, Germany; and in Norway and Denmark, said U.S. Army Element commander LTC Dennis Slagter. Restructuring could increase the number of U.S. soldiers to more than 600 in the near future, he said.

And AFNORTH's area of responsibility — now almost 7 million square kilometers — is four times greater than that of the former AFCENT, Slagter said. The increased land area includes Poland and the Czech Republic.

"Additionally, our maritime area of responsibility has expanded from almost nothing to a substantial area incorporating all the maritime aspects of Norway, Denmark and England," Gaetjen added.

"When we moved our borders to east of Poland and the Czech Republic, we took on more responsibility to integrate their air defense and maritime systems into our defense forces," he said.

Assimilating new armies, systems and ideas into the NATO structure is challenging, Gaetjen said, "because the military structures of Poland and the Czech Republic were very different from the NATO structure."

In a recent address to NATO member-nation representatives in the Netherlands, NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson said a strong alliance is required to meet all the challenges facing NATO today.

American soldiers play an important part throughout AFNORTH. They work in operations, intelligence and logistical support areas, among others, said Slagter.

They work with Army-specific command and control, providing connectivity between the Balkans and NATO, for example. Among its many responsibilities in Central Europe, AFNORTH is focusing on supporting operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. In May, 91 officers and NCOs from AFNORTH were in Bosnia; nearly 200 were in Kosovo, said Gaetjen.

Collectively, some 330 Army soldiers, under Slagter's command, support AFNORTH headquarters from six locations. Slagter said the group includes soldiers from the 414th Signal Company in Sandhofen, Germany. The company is "leased" by NATO to provide tactical communication network support to deployed NATO headquarters. The Maastricht-based communication element is expected to perform that mission within two years.

Back at the headquarters, Army officers are among those from other

**AFNORTH is a multinational, regional headquarters responsible for planning and coordinating the defense of Central Europe. Some 330 soldiers are currently assigned to the organization.**



Allied Forces North — 7 million square kilometers of area responsibility — Operations, Intelligence and logistical Support —

nations developing doctrine, planning joint interoperability exercises and analyzing potential threats the alliance could face in the future, Gaetjen said.

Enlisted soldiers work primarily in administrative areas. Some perform

command-and-control functions. NCOs and senior officers fill key staff positions, said Slagter. All work in a joint and multinational environment, dealing directly with military personnel from about a dozen nations.

"The NATO commander in chief is a German

general," Slagter said. "And a U.S. soldier might have a British flight sergeant as an NCOIC and a German lieutenant colonel for a division chief."

SFC Karen Brackins, admin supervisor for the Operations Division, oversees the paperwork generated by 133 officers, among them Belgian, German, Spanish, Dutch and Czech. She reviews and types their correspondence, schedules appointments and occasionally serves as an interpreter.

"The biggest problem is communication," Brackins said. "Although everyone speaks English, they don't always understand various meanings of words."

"We deal with all kinds of other-service issues," said LTC Roger Austiff, chief of AFNORTH's U.S. Liaison Office. "This job involves a huge learning curve — soldiers have to know how the personnel systems of all the other services work."

Part of the Liaison Office's responsibility is to coordinate with the AFNORTH Support Group for mate-

riel and people to support special ceremonies and events. It also coordinates with all the U.S. services for personnel to fill vacant positions.

SGT Robert Calderwood is a line chief for the support group. He operates three repair lines to fix everything from cars to 10-metric-ton vehicles and field-kitchen units.

"Most of what we work on is manufactured by Mercedes or DAF, a Dutch company," he said.

At the Northern Regional Signal Group, collocated with AFNORTH, SGT Benjamin Bridenbaugh, a stock management NCO, handles all requests for communications equipment parts. SSG Paul Appel, a senior test-measurement diagnostic NCO, repairs calibration systems. And SGT Lydia Hill fixes microwave units that are part of the NATO-standard CIP-67 radio.

SPC Clifton Kulhanek is one of nine U.S. soldiers in AFNORTH's international motor pool. He's responsible for coordinating transportation for NATO exercises and VIP visitors.

LTC Russell Rector, section chief for command and control capabilities assessment, AFNORTH, has also written command and control doctrine.

People in his office "make sure all the services, from all the countries, are capable of integrating, to bring the most punch to the fight," Rector said. "We have to develop a structure that allows all the air, land and naval forces to work together."

Under the new AFNORTH structure, "we have much more battle space, which includes water, and we have integrated a subordinate naval command. As soldiers, we don't do detailed naval planning, but we have to understand it to integrate it with the land and air components," Rector said.

In establishing AFNORTH, "we've cut some levels of command," Rector said. "In all of NATO, restructuring reduced 67 headquarters to about 22 and balanced the services' representation to make it easier for us to conduct joint operations."

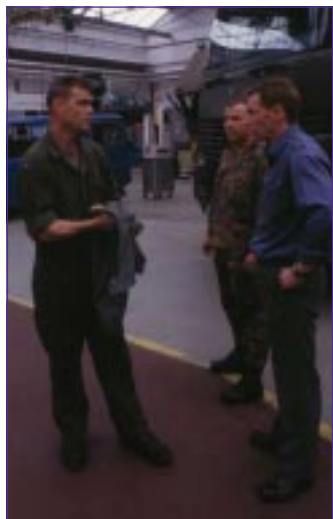
Rector said U.S. soldiers often see international operations only from an American perspective.

A tour at this multinational headquarters opens their eyes. "When you

get here, you see that the Army is just one player among many, and you see how our national interests line up with those of other nations," Rector said.

"You realize that when NATO decides to conduct an operation, it's for the benefit of the vast majority of the countries involved," Rector added.

"Working here causes you to pause and reflect, to try to understand why one country desires a certain course of action," he said. "We may all do the same thing, but we may do it for different reasons. Understanding is key." □



**SGT Robert Calderwood (left), a line chief with the AFNORTH Support Group, discusses a vehicle-repair issue with two allied soldiers.**



**SGT Lydia Hill, a microwave-repair specialist in the Northern Regional Signal Group, works on a NATO-standard radio.**